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SUBJECT: ARGENTINE HISTORIAN DENIED ENTRY TO CUBA: FOREIGN
MINISTRY ASKS WHY

Ref: 05 Buenos Aires 914

11. Summary: Argentine historian and writer Jose Ignacio Garcia Hamilton was denied entry into Cuba moments after arriving on February 18 despite having a valid visa. In public statements, Garcia Hamilton suspects he was denied entry to the country because of his latest book, which includes contributions by an anti-Castro writer, but Cuban officials provided no explanation to Garcia Hamilton for the denial of his entry. The Argentine Embassy in Havana has formally requested an explanation for the action from the Cuban Foreign Ministry. No official reason has as yet been issued by the Cuban regime. While Garcia Hamilton is sufficiently prominent to warrant an official inquiry from the GOA, this incident is unlikely to cause any serious problems in the bilateral relation. It does, however, effectively show the average Argentine the capriciousness of the Castro regime. End Summary.

12. Local Argentine media gave extensive coverage to the Cuban decision on February 18 to deny entry to Jose Ignacio Garcia Hamilton, an Argentine writer and historian. Garcia Hamilton was traveling to Cuba with a valid visa, issued by the Cuban Embassy in Buenos Aires just the week before, mainly for tourism but also to meet with local intellectuals and present his latest book about Simon Bolivar. (Note: an Embassy contact reported that he believed Garcia Hamilton was traveling, at least partially, under the Auspices of the OAS-affiliated Pan American Development Foundation. End Note.) Upon arriving in Havana, immigration officials told Garcia Hamilton that there were orders to prohibit his entry and to deport him, reportedly giving no further explanation. Garcia Hamilton and his wife were then escorted to a plane bound for Panama on which the Argentine ambassador to Cuba, Dario Alessandro, was coincidentally also traveling. Alessandro reportedly tried to intervene, unsuccessfully, on Garcia Hamilton's behalf and then ordered his staff to prepare a diplomatic note to the Cuban Ministry of External Relations requesting an explanation.

13. Garcia Hamilton has stated that he was surprised to be refused entry because he had traveled to Cuba without problems twice before, in 1996 and 2005, and had even met with dissidents on those occasions. He also opined that the situation in Cuba had obviously worsened and was becoming more arbitrary. He ventured that one possible explanation for his exclusion could be the prologue to recent editions of his latest book, written by Castro critic Carlos Alberto Montaner, entitled "Authoritarianism and Unproductiveness." The Cuban Embassy in Buenos Aires has stated that it has no information regarding why Garcia Hamilton was denied entry to Cuba.

14. Comment: Speculation has begun that this episode will add a new element of uncertainty to bilateral relations between Argentina and Cuba, already somewhat strained over the case of Dr. Hilda Molina, the Cuban neurosurgeon who has been denied permission to leave Cuba to visit her family in Argentina

(Reftel). That case has reverberated with the Argentine public and has effectively kept President Kirchner and/or the First Lady from visiting the island. This event probably won't rise to that level but it does work to show to a still generally pro-Castro Argentine public the increasingly petty and irrational whim of Cuban regime. End Comment.

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